NOVEMBER 6, 2002 — MARLTON, N.J.
Investigators Conclude Riley Morris Likely Died After Fall in Abandoned Missile Site Stairwell

Authorities in **Marlton, New Jersey** say new findings from investigators suggest that the death of 19-year-old Riley Morris earlier this year was most likely the result of a severe fall inside the abandoned Cold War missile facility hidden in the township's wooded outskirts.

Morris's body was discovered on June 2 inside a narrow stairwell descending into the underground portion of the former **Nike Missile Battery PH-32**, a long-abandoned military installation located near the Briarwood residential neighborhood.

According to investigators familiar with the case, Morris suffered **significant head trauma consistent with a concussion after** falling down the concrete stairwell leading into the underground structure.

Medical findings indicate that the injury likely left Morris **severely disoriented and unable to move or walk**, preventing him from leaving the area after the fall.

Officials now believe the teenager remained at the bottom of the stairwell for **several days before ultimately dying from his injuries and exposure**.

"The evidence suggests he experienced a serious fall that resulted in a head injury," a law enforcement official involved in the investigation said. "Based on the medical findings, it appears he may have been incapacitated and unable to climb back out."

The stairwell where Morris was discovered descends several feet below ground into the old missile launch complex. Built during the Cold War, the narrow concrete structure was designed for military personnel accessing underground missile storage areas.

After decades of abandonment, investigators say the interior had become extremely hazardous.

"There's no lighting, the steps are steep, and many surfaces are deteriorated," the official said. "If someone fell down there and suffered a head injury, it would be very difficult to escape."

Authorities believe Morris had been **alone at the time of the fall**. Investigators found no evidence that anyone else had been present inside the stairwell during the incident.

Because the location sits deep within wooded land, officials say it is unlikely that calls for help would have been heard by anyone nearby.

"The area is isolated," the investigator said. "Even if someone had been shouting, there's a good chance no one would have heard it."

The circumstances of Morris's death drew significant attention earlier this year because it occurred just two weeks after another tragedy in the same wooded area.

On May 19, the body of 17-year-old Jacob Lee was discovered hanging from a tree near the perimeter of the abandoned missile base. Authorities ruled Lee's death a suicide.

The close timing and proximity of the two incidents sparked speculation among residents that the cases might be connected.

Officials now say the investigation found **no evidence linking the two deaths**.

Mayor Gus Tamburro said the findings reinforce the dangers posed by the abandoned military structures.

"That installation has been abandoned for decades and the conditions there are extremely dangerous," Tamburro said. "Unfortunately this appears to have been a tragic accident."

Following the two incidents earlier this summer, officials in **Evesham Township** moved to close the property. Township crews sealed stairwells and ladder shafts that once allowed access into the underground missile complex. Barriers were also placed along trails leading from nearby neighborhoods into the wooded area.

Authorities continue to urge residents to avoid the property entirely.

"The structures were never designed for public access," Tamburro said. "We don't want anyone else getting hurt exploring something that has been unsafe for many years."

Although investigators now believe Morris's death resulted from a fall, the tragic circumstances — particularly the possibility that he remained trapped for days — have left a lasting impression on residents living near the quiet wooded site.